

14. BIRDS EATING POISONOUS FRUIT OF YELLOW OLEANDER (*THEVETIA NERIFOLIA*)

Earlier, Krishnan has reported in the *Journal* (50: 943-944 and 52: 207) the Koal (*Eudynamys scolopaceus*) and the Common Myna (*Acridotheres tristis*) eating the fleshy mesocarp of the fruit of the Yellow Oleander. Subsequently, Neelakantan (*JBNHS* 51: 738) has noted the same habit in the Common Grey Hornbill (*Tockus birostris*) also.

About the end of August, ripe fruits were dropping to the ground from a single Yellow Oleander in front of my house and, for two days alone, I was noticing the Redvented Bulbuls (*Molpastes cafer*) and the Whitebrowed Bulbuls (*Pycnonotus luteolus*) frequenting the plant for the fruit. These birds are abundant in the surrounding 300-acre scrub jungle of the college estate. Only on a single occasion, did I see a Redvented Bulbul pecking at a fruit on the plant, otherwise, they seemed to prefer the ripe ones fallen on the ground underneath. Each bird would eat about half of the fleshy part of the fruit which it pecked at and tore off with its beak. Sometimes while in fear of intruders, it carried off the fruit to safety in a near-by hedge. I noticed several Common Mynas also approaching the ripe fruit but, strangely enough, none of them touched it.

I feel that the preference shown by birds for the ripe fruits is probably due to the lesser amount of latex they contain than the raw ones. Even then it is not every bird, but only an occasional individual that relishes the fruit. Unfortunately, we have no evidence of the effects of eating such poisonous fruit on the birds concerned, either good or bad.

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15. *CALOTES* LIZARD OCCUPYING BIRD'S NEST

At Jodhpur there was a small nest of a bird (?) in a *Capparis aphylla* bush which was being searched for snakes and small mammals at midnight. The nest was examined and found to be occupied

by a lizard, *Calotes versicolor*. It was carefully captured, identified, and marked with indelible ink. Next evening it was released near the bush. The nest was again examined late in the night and found to be occupied by the same lizard. During the day the nest, which appeared to be abandoned by the owner, was always found vacant. It was only a nightly resort of the *Calotes*, which was observed living there for about a week after which it disappeared.

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May 1, 1959.

ISHWAR PRAKASH

## 16. FLYING SNAKES

(With a text-figure)

I have to report an extraordinary occurrence which happened to me on 16th June 1959.

While walking along a path on my tea estate I saw a snake hurtling through the air towards me on a diagonal trajectory from right to left. When I first saw it, it was about 20 feet above ground level and appeared to have launched itself from a rosewood tree on the slope of 30° above me and some 50 yards away. It came with a furious swimming motion keeping itself perfectly horizontal, and as I drew back whipped past about five feet in front of me at chest level and landed below me between two tea bushes and some five yards away. It lay on a heap of weeds perfectly still, and I was able to observe that it was about 2½ feet long, thin, and coloured yellowy brown with red, black, and white markings on its back. After a few minutes I clambered down the bank to kill it but at the first blow with my stick, which landed towards its tail, it shot off into the bushes. I was unable to observe its head which was in the shadow and behind a branch.

I have never heard of a 'flying snake' or one that could launch itself such a distance and at such a height and anyhow why should it do it? On the other hand if it had been dropped by a bird of prey it would have fallen straight down and not been trajected across my line of vision?